Met Office

March 2012

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

Most of the month was influenced by high pressure, although there were short unsettled spells around 3rd-6th and 17th-18th. Eastern England received some welcome rainfall on 4th, 5th and 17th, but apart from this much of the month was dry, adding to mounting concerns about drought. As well as the dryness, the period 23rd-30th was remarkably sunny across virtually the whole of the UK. Daytime temperatures rose strongly, with many new station records, and also new monthly extremes for Scotland being set.

The UK mean temperature was 2.3 °C above the 1981-2010 average, ranking 3rd warmest in a series since 1910 and the warmest March since 1957. More remarkable still was a maximum temperature anomaly of +3.2 °C, narrowly setting a new record for March. Most of the UK was much drier than average, the exceptions being East Anglia and east Kent. Most of Wales, Northern Ireland, south-west England, parts of northern England and eastern Scotland had less than a third of their normal rainfall amount. However, March 2011 was drier than this in England and similar in Wales. For the UK it was the driest March since 1953, and the 5th driest since 1910; in Eastern Scotland it ranked 3rd driest. Sunshine amounts were well above normal, exceeding 150% for most of England and Wales; indeed this was the sunniest March in England since 1929.

A maximum temperature of 23.6 °C was recorded at Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) on the 27th. A minimum temperature of -8.5 °C was recorded at Braemar (Aberdeenshire) early on the 18th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on the 7th, 101.2 mm of rain fell at Alltdearg House, near Sligachan (Isle of Skye). A wind gust of 71 mph was recorded at Blackford Hill (Edinburgh) on the 7th. A snow-depth of 4 cm was recorded at Leadhills (Lanakshire) at 0900 on the 4th and 5th.

Weather impacts

Despite welcome rainfall across much of eastern England early in the month, drought conditions persisted across East Anglia, the Midlands and southern England with continuing concerns for farming, water resources and the environment generally. Late in the month, the area officially in drought was extended to include parts of Yorkshire. The sustained dry weather and the warmth of the last week resulted in wildfires in various areas including south Wales, Surrey and the Scottish Borders.

Fog was an issue for some parts of central and southern England during the opening days of the month, and again during 11th-16th. During the early hours of 15th, a five-lorry pile-up occurred on the M1 in Nottinghamshire: several people were taken to hospital and the motorway was closed for most of the morning. Later in the month, quiet high-pressure conditions led to some foggy nights and a number of overnight / early morning warnings, particularly across central and eastern England, but also parts of Wales at times between the 23rd and 26th. An accident occurred on the M5 in the West Midlands on the morning of the 24th, in which two people lost their lives and 28 were injured. In both instances, poor visibility may have been a contributory factor.

England diary of highlights

The month was largely dry and settled, with some very high temperatures for the time of year during the last ten days. Rainfall was mostly scarce, and there were several consecutive sunny days late in the month.

The mean temperature was 1.9 °C above the 1981-2010 average; this was the 3rd warmest March in a series since 1910. It was much drier than normal across most of England, with less than half of the average rainfall amount, but not as dry as March 2011. It was a sunny month for most, and the sunniest March since 1929.

1st to 2nd:

High pressure over or close to the UK gave settled conditions. Clear skies overnight led to mist and fog, as well as some local frosts. During the day it was mostly sunny, giving rise to some very high temperatures, notably 16.7 °C at Herstmonceux (East Sussex) on 1st.

3rd to 7th:

During the weekend of 3rd and 4th rain, with strong winds, spread south-east across the UK. The rain was heavy at times and locally turned to snow on its western edge as it cleared through, followed by a mixture of sunshine and occasionally heavy showers for most parts. More than 15 mm was recorded across much of eastern England on 4th and again across East Anglia on 5th. The rain and brisk winds lingered in the south-east until the morning of 6th, whereas the rest of the country saw drier conditions on 5th and 6th except for a few showers in the west. Further rain spread across the UK during the night of 6th and through 7th, again followed by a mixture of sunshine and occasionally heavy showers.

8th to 16th:

The weather became more settled again, and mainly dry. It was cloudy at times, particularly in the west, with some morning fog. However sunny spells did develop, particularly in eastern and central parts, and in these areas it became warm, the temperature reaching 19.0 °C at Gravesend (Kent) on 15th.

17th to 18th:

There was a brief unsettled and cooler spell on 17th and 18th. Rain spread from the west in the early hours of 17th, eventually clearing the far southeast in late evening. The rain was followed by showers, which merged to give more persistent rain across northern and some central parts. The showers continued on 18th, with some heavy and thundery outbreaks, particularly in the more persistent band which gradually slipped south into the Midlands, where the rain turned to sleet and even snow briefly.

19th to 29th:

This period was settled, and increasingly warm and sunny by day, with an area of high pressure over the UK. Some mornings were rather cloudy with mist and fog reported in places, particularly in the east. However this cleared each day to allow widespread sunshine, except in parts of the extreme east which remained rather cloudy on some days. Maximum temperatures exceeded 20 °C in places between 24th and 29th (22.8 °C at St James's Park and Heathrow, both Greater London, on 28th), with some local March records being broken. However where the cloud lingered temperatures were markedly cooler, failing to reach 10 °C in a few places on 25th and 26th.

30th to 31st:

Though still quite settled, the high pressure had now migrated westwards, allowing a cooler north to north-westerly flow to become established, with more in the way of cloud, so temperatures were markedly lower than on preceding days. However, there were some sunny spells, particularly during the afternoon of the 30th, and where these occurred temperatures were still above average.

Wales diary of highlights

Apart from two short unsettled spells, the month was mainly settled and fine, with some record-breaking high temperatures during the last few days.

The mean temperature was 2.1 °C above the 1981-2010 average, equal second warmest in a series since 1910. It was much drier than normal across all of Wales, with typically less than a third of the average rainfall amount, about the same as March 2011. Sunshine totals were above the long-term average. It was the 5th driest and 5th sunniest March in the historical series.

1st to 3rd:

High pressure dominated, with a mild south-westerly flow. It was sunny by day, but dense fog occurred overnight in places. Trawsgoed (Ceredigion) reached 15.1 °C on 2nd.

4th to 7th:

It became much more unsettled and windy, with bands of heavy rain or showers moving in from the west. Some overnight fog and frost were reported on 6th.

8th to 10th:

Settled weather returned, with mild west to south-westerly winds, and any rain was restricted to North Wales. There were good sunny spells across much of the country. Usk (Monmouthshire) reached 17.7 °C on 10th.

11th to 16th:

The continued influence of high pressure gave dry conditions, and, with southerly winds, temperatures started to climb well above normal during the day, but there was dense fog overnight throughout this period. Tredegar (Blaenau Gwent) recorded 15.3 °C on 13th.

17th to 18th:

These two days were unsettled, with rain moving in from the Atlantic followed by a showery airstream, some of the showers turning heavy.

19th to 29th:

A dry and warm spell, with high pressure covering the country during the period and some very warm air being drawn up from the south. Several station temperature records fell during this spell. On 24th Porthmadog (Gwynedd) reached 22.2 °C, the warmest day of the year so far in Wales. On 27th the temperature reached 20.5 °C at Rhyl (Denbighshire), and on 28th Usk recorded 21.9 °C.

30th to 31st:

As high pressure slipped away westwards, more cloud spread in and temperatures fell back close to normal, but it remained mostly dry.

Scotland diary of highlights

The first part of the month was unsettled, but thereafter high pressure was dominant, giving plenty of fine, dry weather and record-breaking high temperatures for many.

The mean temperature was 2.9 °C above the 1981-2010 average, the equal warmest March in a series since 1910 (tied with 1938). It was much drier than normal, with about half the normal amount in the Western and Northern Isles but less than a third of normal across the eastern side; Eastern Scotland had its 3rd driest March in a series since 1910. Sunshine amounts were above normal except for Shetland.

1st to 9th:

Light rain over north-western areas on 1st moved south on 2nd to affect some central areas. The 3rd saw a band of rain in the south-west in the morning, moving north-east during the day to leave a scattering of showers which became more widespread during 4th. The 5th saw more in the way of sunshine, and just a few scattered showers for the far north. After a bright start on 6th, rain spread from the west during the afternoon, clearing overnight. The 7th was showery, with strong north-westerly winds, and snow over higher ground in the north, Aviemore (Highland) reporting a snow depth of 3 cm by 0900 on 8th. After a bright start on 8th, rain spread into western and central areas during the afternoon. The 9th started wet in the northwest, although the rain became more patchy as it moved south-eastwards during the afternoon leaving some scattered showers.

10th to 20th:

It was dry, mild but generally cloudy from 10th to 14th, eastern areas seeing the best of any sunshine. On 15th a band of patchy light rain affected far western areas, with the east staying largely dry but cloudy. The 16th was a wet day for central and southern areas, but the north remained largely dry. The 17th and 18th gave scattered showers in the far north-west, elsewhere having long sunny spells. Some places were cold by night, Braemar (Aberdeenshire) recording -8.5 °C in the early hours of 18th. By contrast, 19th saw rain in most areas, heaviest in the north-west, clearing overnight to give a drier and brighter day on 20th.

21st to 31st:

The dry and sunny theme continued on 21st and 22nd, with Lossiemouth (Morayshire) reaching 17.6 °C on 21st. The 23rd started with some mist and low cloud for eastern areas although the far west saw patchy rain later in the day. Dry, sunny and warm weather returned from 24th until 30th, and Scotland's March temperature record was broken on three successive days. Firstly on 25th, Fyvie Castle (Aberdeenshire) recorded 22.8 °C, then Cromdale (Moray) peaked at 23.2 °C the following day, and finally Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) reached 23.6 °C on 27th to set the new record. Temperatures began to drop from 29th onwards, as winds turned north-westerly, with 30th and 31st continuing mostly dry but cloudier.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

The first nine days of the month were generally unsettled and showery, then the remainder was mostly dry, bright and warm.

The mean temperature was 2.3 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the equal 4th warmest March in a series from 1910. It was much drier than normal, with barely a quarter of the long-term average March rainfall. It was the driest March since 1953, and the 4th driest in a series since 1910. Sunshine amounts were above normal.

1st to 9th:

The 1st and 2nd were generally dry but cloudy, although northern areas saw some light showers. Showers were more widespread on 3rd and 4th. The 5th was bright with sunny spells and fewer showers. Although 6th started bright, patchy light rain spread from the west during the morning, clearing overnight to leave a brighter day on 7th but with plenty of showers in a strong north-westerly wind. The 8th was generally dry and bright, but breezy at times. On 9th a band of rain spread south-east during the afternoon.

10th to 31st:

The 10th to 14th were dry, mild but generally cloudy. On 15th, after a bright start, a band of patchy rain spread from the west during the morning, clearing south-east overnight. There was more rain followed by showers for most areas on 16th. The 17th and 18th were brighter days with plenty of sunshine, although some western areas had scattered showers. The 19th started bright but a band of light and patchy rain spread from the west during the afternoon, clearing overnight to leave a dry day on 20th with sunny spells. It continued dry and sunny on 21st and 22nd. A band of rain spread northwards in the early hours of 23rd, clearing during the

morning to leave a bright day. Dry, sunny and warm weather returned from 24th until 30th, temperatures reaching 21.4 °C at Giants Causeway (County Antrim) on 27th (just 0.3 deg C below the March record for Northern Ireland) and 20.1 °C at Stormont (County Antrim) on 28th. Winds turned north-westerly on 29th and 30th and so temperatures returned to nearer normal for the time of year. The 31st was rather cloudier but remained dry.

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